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Tuesday, October 28, 2008

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October 28, 2008

Mom pulled from river in Mt. Clemens is charged

She's in jail; toddler is in foster care

BY CHRISTINA HALL
FREE PRESS STAFF WRITER

A 43-year-old Virginia woman was arraigned Monday on a child abuse charge a day after the woman -- who was intoxicated -- and her 22-month-old daughter were pulled from the Clinton River in downtown Mt. Clemens.

Yvette Branch is charged with one count of second-degree child abuse, a felony punishable by up to four years in prison. She was ordered held in the Macomb County Jail on \$7,500 bond at her arraignment in 41-B District Court in Clinton Township.

The toddler was treated at Mt. Clemens Regional Medical Center, then turned over to the county's protective services for placement in foster care, Macomb County Sheriff's Capt. Tony Wickersham said Monday.

He said investigators speculate the mother might have lost her balance and fallen off a dock with the toddler, who was in a stroller. Mother and daughter were pulled from the river about 5:20 p.m. Sunday.

Wickersham said a preliminary breath test showed the mother had a blood-alcohol level of 0.28% -- more than three times the limit of .08 at which an adult motorist can be convicted of drunken driving in Michigan. He did not know where she was drinking prior to going to the riverbank with her child.

"Her story didn't match up with what happened at the scene," he said. "We felt there was some type of neglect and she didn't protect her child."

The pair was pulled from the river by a 21-year-old Ferndale man. The man was in the area with a 49-year-old Mt. Clemens woman, who lay down on a wall to reach for the mother and child, Wickersham said.

He declined to release the names of the witnesses, including a 22-year-old Rochester woman, who told authorities that the mother was not screaming for help after she went into the water.

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ClickOnDetroit.com

Mother Charged After Falling In Water With Toddler

Baby, Mother Rescued From Clinton River

POSTED: 10:31 am EDT October 28, 2008

UPDATED: 11:14 am EDT October 28, 2008

MT. CLEMENS, Mich. -- A Virginia mother was arraigned on Monday on a child abuse charge after the woman, who was drunk, and her 22-month-old child were pulled from the Clinton River in downtown Mt. Clemens.

Yvette Branch, 43, was charged with one count of second-degree child abuse, which is a felony punishable by up to four years in prison.

Police said they suspect Branch was walking along the river with her toddler, who was in a stroller, when she lost her balance and fell in.

A German exchange student told police he saw commotion by the gazebo at about 5:30 p.m. Monday and realized the woman and the stroller carrying the baby fell in.

Nicolas Eckhoff jumped in the frigid waters and pulled the child from the stroller and out of the water. Eckhoff was with a Mt. Clemens woman who laid down on the wall to reach for the mother.

The toddler was treated at Mt. Clemens Regional Medical Center, and then turned over to the county's child protective services for foster care placement, said police.

Preliminary breath tests revealed Branch had a blood-alcohol level of 0.28% -- more than three times the drunken driving limit in Michigan of .08.

Police said they were not sure where the woman was drinking prior to going to the riverbank with her child. But her story did not seem to match, said police.

Branch is being lodged at the Macomb County Jail on a \$7,500 bond.

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From the Los Angeles Times

Editorial

Nebraska's safe-haven fiasco

The state's flawed law shows why it's crucial to know how to find help if there's a crisis.

October 28, 2008

For the last few weeks, the nation has watched, appalled, as parents exploited Nebraska's poorly written safe-haven law -- meant to safeguard newborn babies -- using it to discard their young children and teenagers at hospitals without fear of prosecution. By now, the stories are well known: One mother drove for hours from Michigan to abandon an unruly teen; a bereaved widower turned over nine of his children, saying he could no longer care for them. In all, at least 20 children have been abandoned in Nebraska since the law took effect in July. The unicameral Legislature reconvenes in January, and Gov. Dave Heineman and a majority of legislators already say the first order of business will be to amend the law.

Next should come an intensive effort to publicize the counseling and family intervention services that are available to struggling families. This goes for Nebraska and also every state and county across the country. Nebraska's problem was unique because of a poorly written law, but the truth is that parents and guardians have always needed help raising their children, and increasingly that help is coming from government. Only a generation ago, relatives pitched in, as did neighbors, friends, churches and civic organizations. But for many today, those bonds are too weak to form a meaningful safety net.

In Los Angeles, many parents turn to the county for help. Last year, the Department of Children and Family Services hotline received 5,543 referrals for "caregiver absence or incapacity." Admittedly, that category encompasses parents who are incarcerated, hospitalized or homeless. But officials say it also includes those who voluntarily, temporarily relinquish children. For families in need of respite, the county will take children into custody for up to six months -- no court order involved. Parents must then participate in county programs meant to help reunite the family. To have their children returned to them, they must demonstrate that they are capable of being responsible. If not, the courts intervene. These temporary separations, officials say, often make the difference for a family that just needs help during a rough patch -- say, a hospitalization or the loss of a home.

Today more than ever, struggling families across the country need to know what services are available. Here are some in Southern California: L.A. County Department of Children and Family Services hotline, (800) 540-4000; Orange County Child Abuse Registry, (800) 207-4464; Ventura County Human Services Agency hotline, (805) 654-3200. In all three counties, you can dial 211 for a list of available services.

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In Michigan, 70 percent expected to go to the polls

Posted by [anash](#) October 28, 2008 12:59PM

Expect the lines to be long on Election Day.

Secretary of State Terri Lynn Land said Tuesday that she expects more than 5 million Michigan residents will vote Nov. 4, or about 70 percent of registered voters.

That's even higher than in 2004, when more than 4.8 million people went to the polls, or just under 68 percent of the 7.2 million registered.

Michigan now has nearly 7.5 million registered voters, 98 percent of its voting-age population.

Land is basing her estimate on past presidential election year turnout, absentee voter activity, information from local officials, the high degree of interest in the presidential race, the number of races on the ballot and the high level of voter involvement in campaigns.

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MICHIGAN REPORT

The Capitol Record Since 1906

REPORT NO. 208, VOLUME 47-- MONDAY, OCTOBER 27 2008

GRANHOLM ADDS ENERGY TO D.L.E.G. BRIEF

As part of her drive to make energy a leading factor in an economic turnaround for Michigan, [Governor Jennifer Granholm](#) on Monday issued an executive order converting the Department of Labor and Economic Growth into the Department of Energy, Labor and Economic Growth.

Ms. Granholm also announced that Skip Pruss, who has been her special advisor on energy, will serve as director of the department as the current DLEG director, Keith Cooley, is resigning to take the post of CEO with NextEnergy in Detroit.

The department restructuring was made part of [Executive Order 2008-20](#). Under the reorganization the newly structured department will take charge of development of alternative energy sources as well major conservation programs. Prior to the order both functions were the responsibility of the departments of Agriculture and Environmental Quality respectively.

"The new energy economy is singularly Michigan's greatest opportunity to create thousands of new jobs, attract new investment and diversify our economy," Ms. Granholm said in a statement.

Consolidating all of the state's various efforts into one agency will provide for greater efficiency in focusing development efforts of energy-related industries, Ms. Granholm said.

Ms. Granholm also said the department will help promote the development of advanced energy technologies which will prove vital to the state's efforts to rebuild the auto industry by creation of new power trains and fuel systems that would be part of alternative energy cars and trucks.

Ms. Granholm also said the department will help to coordinate efforts with NextEnergy to further boost the state's alternative energy and development strategy.

The departmental changes will stand approved unless rejected by both houses of the Legislature within 60 days. Mr. Pruss' appointment is subject to confirmation by the Senate, again within 60 days.



More caseworkers to oversee foster care

Posted by Craig Trudell | Jackson Citizen Patriot October 28, 2008 08:25AM

A recent lawsuit settlement is expected to boost the number of foster care caseworkers in Jackson County, thereby strengthening the safety net for hundreds of children.

The settlement reached between the state and Children's Rights, a New York advocacy group, requires an overhaul to Michigan's foster care system and will cost the Department of Human Services an estimated \$21 million for the fiscal year, which began Oct. 1. Prior to the settlement, the state had budgeted \$210 million for its foster-care program.

Foster care in the county

- There were 132 children in foster care in an average month.
- There was an average of 15 applications a month for foster-care service.
- The state made \$2.3 million in vendor payments to foster-care providers.

— Source: Michigan Department of Human Services 2007 fiscal year annual report

The changes in Jackson County must be implemented in the next two years. The state will hire up to 700 additional caseworkers statewide — including several in Jackson — who oversee children in foster care or protective services and help place them in homes. The settlement prohibits foster care caseworkers from handling more than 15 cases and child protective services workers more than 12.

Judy Jove, executive director of Family Service & Children's Aid, 330 W. Michigan Ave., said her staff of three caseworkers were handling 62 children as of last week, or roughly 20 cases each.

"These are Michigan's kids, and we need to do a better job by them," Jove said. "These are kids who need a lot of attention and work, and it's hard when you're stretched very thin. The lower case loads will help us to do a much better job."

The settlement is expected to cost the state \$12 million in combined additional funding for the 2010 and 2011 fiscal years, DHS spokesman Edward Woods III said.

By fiscal year 2012, the department expects the changes brought on by the settlement to result in a \$7 million gain because the improvements are expected to

expedite the process of moving children into permanent homes.

"The whole thing is about getting permanency for these children," Woods said. "As long as it's safe for these children to be reunited with their parents, we will do so. If that is not possible, we will find them a home."

Jack Kresnak, president and CEO of the advocacy group Michigan's Children, said the settlement may help prevent mishandled cases.

"Before this, the foster care system was operating with restricted resources, overworked caseworkers and just a general malaise," Kresnak said.

Kresnak, a retired Detroit Free Press reporter, wrote a 14-part series about Ricky Holland, a 7-year-old Williamston boy killed by his foster parents in 2006. Ricky was originally from Jackson; the family moved a few months before he was killed.

The foster parents put the child on powerful drugs in their efforts to control his behavior, which should have been a sign to DHS workers that something was wrong, Kresnak said.

The settlement mandates the state redirect at least \$3 million to mental health services funding within the foster care system, as well as add a foster care medical director position.

"This would have made a difference with Ricky," Kresnak said.

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MICHIGAN REPORT

The Capitol Record Since 1906

REPORT NO. 208, VOLUME 47-- MONDAY, OCTOBER 27 2008

ORGANIZATION SAID MICHIGAN VIRTUALLY ALONE AGAINST SAGGING REVENUES

Michigan is virtually the only state among 15 large and medium-sized states in the United States to have not seen significant drops in revenues in the last full fiscal quarter, a national group that studies state budgets said Monday, but in part that is because Michigan has already dealt with reduced revenues through a tax increase.

According to a study by the Center for Budget and Policy Priorities, which is considered a liberal think tank, if revenues continue to be sluggish, as they were from July to September for the 15 largest states, it could mean a budget gap of as much as \$100 billion by the start of the 2009-10 fiscal year, which for most states starts in July.

That could lead to sharp cuts in various services, including health care coverage, when the prospect of higher unemployment nationwide means that more people could need such care, the group said. The organization also said states could look to increasing taxes to help stave off some major budget cutting.

Michigan was the only state of the 15 - the others being California, Georgia, Idaho, Illinois, Massachusetts, Minnesota, Missouri, New York, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Tennessee, Virginia, Washington and Wisconsin - that saw overall revenues increase during that quarter when adjusted for inflation.

In raw numbers, Michigan saw overall tax growth in that quarter of 5.7 percent (several states also saw growth in raw numbers, including Illinois, Ohio and Wisconsin), according to the [study](#). However, the median for all the states surveyed was an actual drop of .5 percent in raw numbers.

But when adjusted for inflation, Michigan alone saw revenue growth, of .4 percent. The median loss for the states in terms of income was 5.5 percent.

Either cutting budgets or raising taxes are likely to cause harm to the overall economy, the center said, because that would reduce overall spending either by state and local governments or by the public.

The study did not look at some of the largest states, including Texas, Florida and New Jersey, because figures were not available for the quarter. Texas and Florida also do not impose income taxes. Only one state in those surveyed, Washington, does not levy an income tax.